

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0793

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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AMEMBASSY PANAMA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 4458

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: USGA, PINT

SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS NAME GENERAL RIOS MONTT PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE

SUMMARY: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DCG) SELECTS
FORMER ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL RIOS MONTT AS
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE TO REPLACE RENE DE LEON SCHLOTTER
IN A MOVE DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE OPPOSITION UNITY UNDER
DCG BANNER. RIOS IS CAPABLE LEFT-OF-CENTER MILITARY OFFICER
WHO, IF HE BECOMES THE OPPOSITION UNITY CANDIDATE, WOULD
OFFER VOTERS CLEAR CHOICE BETWEEN CONTINUING SAME GENERAL
POLICY OF PRESENT ADMINISTRATION UNDER GOG COALITION
CANDIDATE GEN. LAUGERUD, OR SHIFTING PERCEPTIBLY BUT
NOT RADICALLY TO LEFT. NEITHER CANDIDATE WOULD PRESENT
THREAT TO VITAL U.S. INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A SURPRISE MOVE ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT, CHRISTIAN
DEMOCRATS ACCEPTED RESIGNATION OF THEIR LONG-TIME
LEADER DE LEON SCHLOTTER AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
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AND PICKED GENERAL EFRAIN ROIS MONTT, WHO HAD BEEN

ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF FROM JANUARY TO JUNE OF THIS YEAR, AND WHO IS NOW SERVING AS DIRECTOR OF STUDIES AT INTER-AMERICAN DEFENSE COLLEGE, TO TAKE HIS PLACE. DE LEON HAD ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO RESIGN AS DCG PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ON SEPTEMBER 11 AFTER UNITY TALKS WITH PR LEADER AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CARLOS SAGASTUME HAD BROKEN DOWN WHEN SAGASTUME REPORTEDLY REFUSED TO GO ALONG WITH DE LEON'S PROPOSAL TO NAME A THIRD PERSON AS A PR-DCG UNITY CANDIDATE. RIOS WAS SELECTED FROM A DCG SLATE WHICH INCLUDED FORMER CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT COL. ENRIQUE PERALTA AZURDIA AND ECONOMIST MANUEL NORIEGA MORALES.

2. DCG COMMUNIQUE SAYS GEN. RIOS WAS SELECTED BECAUSE OF PARTY'S DECISION THAT "CIRCUMSTANCES" CALLED FOR A CANDIDATE WHO COULD UNIFY OPPOSITION, A MAN WHO WAS ACTIVE IN NO PARTY, BUT WHO HAD PRESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS AND WOULD GUARANTEE TO PEOPLE THAT CHANGES ENVISIONED IN DCG PROGRAM OF GOVERNMENT WOULD BE REALIZED. IT ALSO PRAISES DE LEON HIGHLY FOR STEPPING ASIDE.

3. RIOS' SELECTION COMES AS SOMEWHAT OF A SURPRISE SINCE MANY THOUGHT THAT CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WERE WELL ON WAY TO PICKING COL. PERALTA WHO HAS HAD A NUMBER OF TALKS WITH THEM, TALKS WHICH PERALTA HIMSELF DESCRIBED TO US PRIVATELY TWO DAYS AGO AS VERY PROMISING. HOWEVER, DE LEON TOLD US SEVERAL WEEKS AGO THAT ALTHOUGH NOT ALL HIS COLLEAGUES AGREED, HE WAS PERSONALLY AGAINST PERALTA'S CANDIDACY BECAUSE HE DID NOT THINK THERE WOULD BE MUCH OPPORTUNITY UNDER A PERALTA GOVERNMENT TO CARRY OUT THE DCG'S REFORM PROGRAM. IN THIS CONNECTION, PRESS SAYS THAT GEN. RIOS HAS BEEN CONSULTED AND THAT HE IS DISPOSED TO FOLLOW DCG PROGRAMS.

4. RIOS HAS THE REPUTATION OF BEING ONE OF THE GUATEMALAN ARMY'S MOST CAPABLE OFFICERS WHO IS AT THE SAME TIME LEFT OF CENTER IN HIS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. WE HAVE LITTLE DOUBT THAT HE WILL GO OVER WELL WITH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC RANK AND FILE, AND WE BELIEVE THAT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO GET THE SUPPORT OF MAYOR MEME COLOM AND HIS FURD, SINCE COLOM HAS SPOKEN TO US FAVORABLY ABOUT RIOS ON A NUMBER OF

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OCCASIONS. WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF THE PR MIGHT SHIFT TO RIOS EVEN IF CARLOS SAGASTUME RUNS AS AN INDEPENDENT PR CANDIDATE. INSUM RIOS, WHO IS A CHARISMATIC SPEAKER, WOULD MAKE A FORMIDABLE CANDIDATE, ALTHOUGH NOT AS STRONG A CANDIDATE AS COL. PERALTA, SINCE HE WOULD PROBABLY NOT PULL THE CENTER RIGHT VOTES WHICH PERALTA COULD ATTRACT.

5. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL OF THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL, IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT RIOS WILL ACTUALLY GET THE DCG CANDIDACY. HIS SELECTION BY THE DCG NATIONAL COUNCIL MUST BE RATIFIED BY THE PARTY'S NATIONAL CONVENTION ONCE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ARE CONVOKED BY THE GOG, WHICH MUST LEGALLY DO SO BY NOVEMBER. THE FACT THAT THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE INTERNAL DISSENSION WITHIN THE DCG OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO USE THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL AND OTHER LEGAL MANEUVERS TO FRUSTRATE RIOS' CANDIDACY IF IT WHOULD DECIDE TO DO SO.

6. WE FEEL SURE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE UNHAPPY WITH RIOS' SELECTION, BUT ARE NOT YET IN A POSITION TO GAUGE TO WHAT DEGREE. WE BELIEVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL WORRY LESS ABOUT GEN. RIOS THAN IT WOULD ABOUT COL. PERALTA, SINCE RIOS IS NOT LIKELY TO SAP THE POLITICAL OR FINANCIAL STRENGTH OF GOG CANDIDATE LAUGERUD THE WAY PERALTA WOULD. THE GOG COULD DECIDE TO ALLOW RIOS TO RUN, AND HOPE TO SPLIT THE LEFT BY INSURING THAT CARLOS SAGASTUME ALSO RUNS AS AN INDEPENDENT.

7. ONE OTHER INTANGIBLE AT PRESENT IS THE POSITION OF THE ARMY. RIOS IS NOT POPULAR AMONG HIS PEERS, AND INDEED ONE OF THE REASONS FOR HIS ABRUPT DISMISSAL AS ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF WAS THAT HE AROUSED THE ENMITY OF SENIOR COMMANDERS BY BEING TOO MUCH OF A DISCIPLINARIAN. HOWEVER, HE IS RESPECTED BY A NUMBER OF ARMY RANK AND FILE AND THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE SOME RESISTANCE TO ANY MOVE TO PREVENT RIOS' CANDIDACY BY BLATANT MEANS.

8. IN CONCLUSION, WE NOTE THAT IF GEN. RIOS IS ABLE TO BECOME AN OPPOSITION COALITION CANDIDATE, THE GUATEMALAN ELECTORATE WOULD BE PROVIDED WITH A FAIRLY CLEAR CHOICE
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OF ELECTING A PRESIDENT WHO WOULD BY AND LARGE CONTINUE THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS OF THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION, OR CHOOSING A MAN WHO WOULD MOVE PERCEPTIBLY BUT NOT RADICALLY TO THE LEFT. WE BELIEVE THAT NEITHER CANDIDATE WOULD REPRESENT A THREAT TO VITAL U.S. INTERESTS.
DREYFUSS

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